2. The Cochin Verumpattamdars Act (Amendment) Bill

Mr. A. Eachara Menon *(Chittur-Tattamangalam)*: Sir, I beg leave of the House to postpone the consideration of the Cochin Verumpattamdars Act Amendment Bill.

Mr. President : A further postponement.

3. The Cochin News-Papers Act (Repeal) Bill—*(cont.)*

***Mr. P. Kumaran Ezhuthassan** *(Vadakkancheri)*: Mr. President, Sir, last session when the House rose, I was in possession of the House making observations, or rather about to make observations, about the motion before the House. Sir, the News-papers Act of Cochin contains only a very small number of sections which, as characterised by the Hon'ble the then Law Member, are after all very innocent. This piece of legislation Sir which is rather requested to be repealed through this amending Bill has got a history. Briefly it is this. Just two or three days preceding the last meeting of the Legislative Session of 1111, *i.e.*, on 24th March 1936, a Proclamation was seen published in the Cochin Government Gazette. That was published, Sir, just two or three days before the meeting. The insult to this House in passing an Act which stifles the liberties of the Press just on the eve of the meeting of the Council is there. What action followed that ? The first day on which this Council met we wanted the business of this House to be adjourned as a mark of strong protest against this high-handed action amounting even to an insult. By an elaborate process of reasoning adopted by some section of this House naturally the Treasury Benches, that motion was ruled out by the then President, which led to the only alternative left to the members who opposed that attitude of the Government, *i.e.*, a walk out. In that walk out were Hon'ble Members like the leader of the Praja Mandalam Party, My Hon'ble friend Mr. Menon, an ex-Minister of this House My friend Mr. T. K. Nayar, a veteran journalist who is unfortunately not in his seat now, Rao Sahib Ayyappan and minor friends like me and others. Faced with this emphatic protest registered on the very first day of the meeting, the then Hon'ble Member for law was sufficiently foolish to come forward with the bill 2 days hence, *i.e.*, on the 26th, hoping against hopes, perhaps to see that the Bill is sanctioned by this House. At that time Sir, the Hon'ble Member for Law an indefatigable member of this House, a brilliant man, who subsequently unfortunately accepted a job in the Government service and was rewarded with the highest place in the Judiciary and has subsequently retired, that Hon'ble Member was pleased to give us a history of the Press Legislation, if not the world over, throughout India with emphasis on press regulations and restrictions in Native States. Said he then Sir, that Cochin in contrast with the other Indian States had a unique position in that it had no Press Law of any sort. He said that we were keeping a unique position and he instanced the case of Travancore, our neighbouring State, having a Press Law even ten years prior to that and he also said then that Press Law was passed against the teeth of opposition by our counter-part, the Legislative Council of Travancore. He emphatically said, repeatedly said, that our position was unique. But that uniqueness was disturbed by that redoubtable champion of the liberties of the people. I am only quoting his own words. He said then Sir, that he came forward with that Bill on behalf of the public of Cochin to safeguard their liberties and for that purpose he said that he had no hesitation at all to stifle the activities of the Press. "Stifle" is his own word, Sir. The proceedings will show, Sir, that such remarks prefactory he wanted the support of this House at least to send the Bill to a Select Committee admitting in so many words, not by inferance, that the Bill as drafted is not anything perfect, more safeguards, if necessary, may be introduced and the whole thing may be looked into by the Select Committee. This House Sir, then true to their position as representatives of the people of the State and consistent with the attitude that we adopted on the very first day this insult was hurled on Cochin, threw out the Bill, and the Government did not challenge a division because they knew that the solitary bench, wooden as it is, alone would be in support of the Bill. That is the early history. That was in Meenam.

Then came the Budget Session within three months. While discussing the General Administration demand, a cut motion was unanimously passed by this House saying that this Proclamation which under the law will be in force only for six months be abrogated. It was unanimously passed and then also the House contained veteran journalists like my friend already referred to, another journalist older still, the Editor of Sathyanadham and another person a retired Advocate-General and Law Member for the Government, Mr. Ambadi Sankara Menon, With

*Speech not corrected by the Hon'ble Member.

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